



# NEVADA WILDERNESS PROJECT

Summer 2012



A handful of NWP board members and staffers head off into the Hoover Wilderness.

## Easements just one of many conservation tools used by NWP

The Nevada Wilderness Project Board and Staff recently spent a weekend camping along the Nevada-California near Bridgeport, Calif.

In addition to spending some time hiking in the Twin Lakes area and into the Hoover Wilderness in the Sierra, we also got a chance to visit some very special wildlife habitat.

This is Bistate Sage-grouse country and we spent several hours visiting key areas where NWP wildlife biologist Gregg

Tanner has been working with landowners and federal agencies identifying and conserving the wet meadows the endangered sage-grouse rely on to rear their young.

The sage-grouse tour was a good reminder of how NWP uses various instruments from a vast "toolbox" of land protections to help conserve special landscapes and sensitive wildlife habitats. In the case of the sage-grouse, which is a candidate for protection under the Endangered Species Act, NWP has been talking up conservation easements with private landowners to help them understand that their irrigated meadows are not just picturesque panoramas where happy cows graze.

These irrigated pastures and natural wet meadows are also vital to the sage-grouse, who need the bugs and water and cover provided by these meadows to bring their young to maturity. Part of NWP's mission is to conserve these types of critical habitats.

Conservation easements are one tool to accomplish this. In return for a market-value sum, landowners agree to keep their land in an undeveloped state for perpetuity. That means ranch



Alli Harvey, right, and Craig Mortimore review a map showing sage-grouse leks near Lyon County.

*The Nevada Wilderness Project is a catalyst for wildlife habitat conservation, wilderness preservation and the smart development of renewable energy.*  
[www.wildnevada.org](http://www.wildnevada.org)

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### INSIDE:

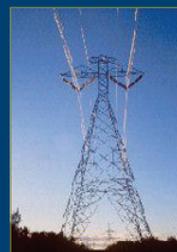
#### WANTED: Inspiring stories



What inspired YOU? We're looking for stories from our members about the experiences that shaped their attitudes toward nature. Details: [Page 2](#).



NWP and Friends of Nevada Wilderness have boots on the ground in Battle Mountain District of the BLM to inventory wilderness lands. Find out why. [Page 3](#).



NWP staffers traveled to Washington, D.C., recently to support a bipartisan bill that sets aside conservation funds from renewable energy projects located on public lands. Details: [Page 4](#).

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The conservation easement for the 10,732 acres of Bridgeport Valley in Mono County along the Nevada border is an example of conserving a scenic working landscape that also provides critical wildlife habitat. Bridgeport Valley is one of the last undeveloped high altitude valleys in California and the largest wetland complex in the Eastern Sierra. It is a haven for wildlife, including the Bistate Sage-grouse. The easement prevented Bridgeport Valley from being sold off as “ranchettes.”

# Land protections can take many forms

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owners can’t subdivide, and those small-acreage “ranchettes” our staff and board noticed springing up outside Bridgeport would have to find other, less-important valleys to build on.

If the Bistate Sage-grouse and its geographically isolated cousin the Greater Sage-grouse are placed on the endangered species list, the bird’s habitat will come under the authority of the federal government. That listing could affect a wide range of activities on public lands in the West – from hiking to camping and other activities.

While Tanner and Mortimore talk about easements with sometimes-skeptical private landowners, they are also having conversations with others. For instance, our bistate tour took us to the former Rosachi Ranch, which, when it was a functioning private enterprise, once irrigated a sprawling meadow area used by the Bistate Sage-grouse.

The nearly 2,397-acre ranch, located on the East Fork of the Walker River in Lyon County, has undergone an ecological makeover since being acquired by the U.S. Forest Service many years ago. In an effort to restore the natural state of the land, oxbows and ponds were added, riparian forests and shrubs were planted, and weeds that had invaded agricultural fields were eradicated or controlled. Wetland plants were planted in oxbow wetlands and willows and cottonwoods were collected locally and planted in the East Walker’s natural floodplain.

While all this work went a long way toward maintaining the clarity and stability of this

7-mile stretch of river, considered one of the top fly-fishing destinations in the eastern Sierra, the amount of wet meadow used by the sage-grouse actually shrank. Tanner is working with federal agencies to see if they can restore some of that habitat.

Wilderness designations are critical for permanently protecting landscapes that provide unmarred characteristics and the opportunities for solitude and “unconfined recreation.” But wilderness designations won’t work for some vital landscapes and wildlife habitats that need protecting.

That’s why NWP also advocates for other



Gregg Tanner points to various areas of the Rosachi Ranch where the habitat for the Bistate Sage-grouse can be improved.

designations, whether it’s an area of critical environmental concern (ACEC), a national conservation area, national monument or even a national wildlife refuge. There are many tools in our toolbox, and it doesn’t make sense to use a hammer to tighten a screw. Advocates for healthy, vital ecosystems look at all methods that allow you to protect public lands and wildlife habitat.

## What inspired YOU?

We’ve all had experiences that shaped our attitudes toward nature. Maybe it was a camping trip as a child or a lecture we attended as an adult. Whatever the case, something *happened* that changed us and made it clear that we were destined to work toward the protection of wild places.

The Nevada Wilderness Project would like you to



share your stories with us. We are collecting these short stories, along with pictures, on our website at <http://www.wildnevada.org/who-inspires-you-2.html>.

If you have a story – and we know you do – please send it to Jim Sloan at [jim.sloan@wildnevada.org](mailto:jim.sloan@wildnevada.org) and help us

build a collections of stories and pictures that reflect who we are and what motivates us to work for the wild. Who knows; you might inspire someone!

## FIELD NOTES

# NWP, Friends inventory wild lands for BLM

This summer, Nevada Wilderness Project and Friends of Nevada Wilderness teamed up to get eyes and ears out in some of our favorite wild landscapes. We hired an all-star field crew – possessing a combination of passion for Wilderness, stellar navigational skills and very legible handwriting – and set them forth into the heart of Nevada’s public lands!

We are joining forces to tackle the daunting task of inventorying a portion of 13.5 million acres of federal, state and public lands for Wilderness characteristics in the Bureau of Land Management (BLM)’s Battle Mountain District. This particular swath of public land has long been in need of a new management plan, and the time was ripe for us to help BLM gather data. In particular, we wanted to provide the BLM with rock solid coordinates, field notes and photographs of public lands in the Battle Mountain District that meet the BLM standards for Wilderness – roadless areas of a certain size, possessing apparent naturalness and offering outstanding



Field worker Scott Moore.

opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation.

We are offering the BLM this data to help it with a planning process it is undergoing in the Battle Mountain and Carson City districts. Every so often, the BLM prepares a comprehensive Resource Management Plan (RMP) and associated Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to guide management of BLM-administered public land.

That may sound dull but the truth is

that these processes inevitably guide the BLM’s management practices based on what is deemed, through the RMP process, appropriate usage of public lands. Therefore, tedious though they may seem, these decisions in land-use plans guide future land-management actions and subsequently may have an effect on specific sites we care about.

The last time NWP conducted an inventory on these same public lands was in 2007, but an inventory can be outdated as soon as a year later depending on how heavily an area is used. So, five years later, we are thrilled to partner with Friends of Nevada Wilderness to find out what’s really going on out there.

We will keep you posted with pictures and field notes! Of course we will also be in touch as soon as there is an opportunity for public comment on land-use planning processes, including, but not limited to, those currently being taken on in BLM-managed public lands. The Battle Mountain District RMP will likely be up for public review in Spring 2013.

## New tiered membership makes supporting NWP easy

Nevada Wilderness Project is rolling out a new tiered membership system that makes it easier for you to contribute to your favorite conservation group – us!

Our new membership structure let’s you pick how you want to donate – and what you’d like in return for your donation.

The structure comes as our Board of Directors is working diligently to match a \$20,000 challenge grant. One of our funders will give us \$20,000 IF our board can raise \$20,000 over the next few months.

The board is reaching out to our supporters for any and all help you can provide. The board is also busy hosting neat fund-raisers. Not those stuffed-shirt affairs like the presidential candidates put on. We’re talking fun stuff, like the Wild Nevada Art Exhibit that we had in our offices during Artown and the GirlFarm Tour the board hosted a few weeks later.

The money they raise – and the money you donate – are critical to our efforts to preserve Nevada’s wild lands and protect sensitive wildlife habitats.

Here are your options for donating to NWP:

**Habitat Defender:** For \$10/month, you get a T-shirt, bumper sticker, programmatic updates



Money raised at the Wild Nevada Art Exhibit will be used to help match NWP’s \$20,000 challenge grant.

from our staff experts and a subscription to our newsletter.

**Conservation Partner:** For \$25/month, you get a T-shirt, the bumper sticker, the newsletter, the Insider Update from our Executive Director and two tickets to our Wild & Scenic Film Festival.

**Wild Nevadan:** For \$75/month, you get all the above PLUS an invitation to special NWP camping trips hosted by our staff wildlife biologist and Dutch Oven master chef Gregg Tanner.

If you want to set up your donation right now, you have three choices:

1. Go to <http://www.wildnevada.org/donate>.

html and fill out the easy forms we have set up there for you.

2. Clip and fill out the form we’ve added to the back page of this newsletter.

3. Call us up! 775-657-8430. We can help you out over the phone, too.

### ‘Wild Nevadans’ get a camping trip with NWP

The NWP camping trip will be hosted by staff and will include transportation from Reno, food, and all gear provided except personal items. The first day will be spent traveling to the camping destination from Reno, setting up camp, and having dinner prepared for you. The next two days we’ll explore our surroundings, taking pictures, viewing wildlife and hiking. The final day we’ll break camp and head back to Reno. Normally trips will be during the late summer or early fall when the weather is best for being outdoors.

# NWP backs bill with royalties for conservation

Nevada Wilderness Project staffers were in Washington, D.C., recently to lend support to a bipartisan bill in the U.S. Senate that ensures funds generated by energy development benefits states, counties and conservation efforts.

The Public Lands Renewable Energy Development Act was introduced by Sen. John Tester, a Democrat from Montana, and Sen. Jim Risch, an Idaho Republican. The measure, SB 1775, also has support from Sen. Harry Reid, sportsmen, Western governors and groups like ours – who think renewable energy development on public land is a good way to reduce our reliance of fossil fuel, provided that the development doesn't harm special landscapes or wildlife and provides money for ongoing conservation efforts.

SB 1775 does that, and while back in Washington, staff wildlife biologists Gregg Tanner and Craig Mortimore pushed hard to generate support for the measure. While they were back there, Rep. Joe Heck of Nevada introduced a companion bill (HR 5991) that assesses royalty payments for renewable energy developments on public lands.

The royalties, in addition to helping pay for the reviews done on these projects by the likes of the Nevada Department of Wildlife and the Bureau of Land Management, will also set up a Renewable Energy Resource Conservation Fund to help wildlife and habitat. Heck's bill sets aside money for the counties where a project is built, giving much-needed



Craig Mortimore



Gregg Tanner

revenue support to strained rural county budgets. In Nevada, much of the solar development has occurred and will continue to occur in Clark County.

The Senate measure ostensibly simplifies the permitting process for renewable energy projects and makes them similar to the guidelines followed by oil and gas development on public

lands. Politicians like the idea because energy development could mean more jobs for rural Western states, whose plentiful sunlight, wind and public land make them ideal for building solar power plants, wind farms and so forth.

States and local governments like jobs, too, but SB 1775 sweetens the pot by requiring energy companies pay royalties to state and local government. Some of that money will be earmarked for conservation.

While sunlight and wind are cleaner energy sources than coal – another energy source that comes largely from the federal estate – these types of renewable energy projects are not entirely benign. A single solar farm can cover

thousands of acres, and if it's not located in a "smart" place – such as a site that already has been disturbed and is near existing roads and transmission lines – the impact can be jarring. That's why we favor "smart from the start" renewable energy projects on public lands that don't threaten wildlife habitat or wild landscapes.

The Renewable Energy Resource Conservation Fund would be administered by the Secretary of the Interior in regions impacted by the development of wind or solar energy. The purpose of the fund would be to address and offset the impacts of those developments, secure recreational improvements to federal land to provide enhanced public access to existing federal land that currently is inaccessible or significantly restricted, and carry out activities authorized under the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965.

The federal government would also be asked to determine the feasibility of carrying out a conservation banking program. A conservation bank is designed primarily to protect the habitat of threatened or endangered species, such as the Greater Sage-grouse. A conservation bank is private or public land that is managed strictly for its resource values; in exchange for permanently protecting the habitat, the bank operator can sell habitat credits to developers who are legally required to compensate for the environmental impacts of their projects.

## Interior Department unveils final solar zones

The Department of the Interior last month identified five areas of Nevada public lands as prime spots for solar energy development.

Nevada was one of six Southwestern states included in the Interior's 3,000-page programmatic environmental impact statement, which identifies 285,000 acres of public lands in 17 areas where large-scale solar projects would enjoy an accelerated review process. This document will facilitate permitting of projects within public lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management.

The Obama administration wants to reduce our nation's dependency on coal-fired power plants, which exacerbate climate change. Renewable energy sources like solar, wind, geothermal and biomass production would also lessen America's dependency upon

foreign petroleum.

The 17 zones have been carefully studied, and the Interior Department is hoping developers will be attracted to them in an effort to save money by utilizing the environmental analysis that's already been completed.

Nevada Wilderness Project staffers have been working for two years with federal officials to identify the best public lands for solar energy development. NWP Renewable Energy Program Coordinator Craig Mortimore praised the Interior's latest plan, saying it will help ensure that future solar plants don't threaten sensitive wildlife habitat or infringe on wildlands.

The Solar Energy Zones – or SEZs – have few biological, cultural or historic conflicts, are located in vicinity to existing electrical

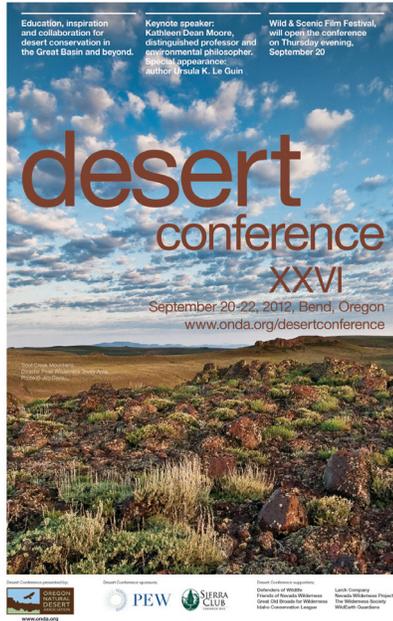
transmission lines or designated corridors and are in areas where sunshine is highly reliable, Mortimore said. The five SEZs in Nevada are mostly within the creosote and yucca desert of Southern Nevada.

"The areas in Nevada identified in this federal plan are really the best locations for large-scale solar projects, which can consume thousands of acres of desert land," Mortimore said.

The 17 zones in Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico and Utah can accommodate enough development to produce an estimated 32,000 megawatts of power. The five areas in Nevada – all located in central or southern Nevada – have the capacity to produce 6,500 megawatts, or enough to power an estimated 2 million homes for a year, the Interior Department said.

## ONDA, NWP to hold desert conference

The Oregon Natural Desert Association (ONDA) and the Nevada Wilderness Project (NWP) are hosting the Desert Conference this fall in Bend, Ore. Since 1978, the Desert Conference has inspired and educated those who care about the high desert of the Great Basin and beyond. The conference provides a forum for land managers, conservation organizations, academics and advocates to educate and collaborate on critical desert issues. The Wild & Scenic Film Festival will kick off the conference on the evening of Sept. 20 and panels will run Sept. 21-22. For more information and to register, go to [www.onda.org/desertconference](http://www.onda.org/desertconference).



## Survey shows support for Gold Butte NCA proposal

A new survey of Clark County voters shows overwhelming support for designating Gold Butte a National Conservation Area with Wilderness. The survey showed voters favored protecting additional public lands in Nevada as wilderness by a better than 2-to-1 margin, and 66 percent favored making Gold Butte a National Conservation Area.

The Gold Butte NCA is popular among men and women of all ages throughout the county, including Democrats and Republicans; hunters and hikers; and campers, mountain bikers and off-road enthusiasts. Voters who occasionally or frequently use Nevada public lands for off-road vehicle recreation activities – typically a group that doesn't favor wilderness proposals – were especially in favor of the Gold Butte National Conservation Area with Wilderness idea; 73 percent support it.

Gold Butte is a 350,000-acre landscape rich in archeological, cultural and biological resources, including thousands of Native American petroglyphs, mining era artifacts, desert bighorn sheep and the federally threatened desert tortoise. Its dramatic geologic formations include slot canyons, stunning red rock cliffs and countless canyons and washes.

The survey comes on the heels of a vote by the Mesquite City Council to reaffirm its support for an NCA with wilderness for Gold Butte. Nevada Wilderness Project and other Gold Butte supporters managed to fight back an attempt by members of the Mesquite City Council to rescind that two-year-old resolution.

## Our new staff members bring impressive skills to work

There are a couple of new faces around the Nevada Wilderness Project these days – Nic Nelson, our new development director, and Rita Smyth, our new administrative director.

Nic and Rita come not only with outstanding professional skills but also with field experience and a commitment to protecting wildlands and wildlife habitats.

Rita, for instance, not only has years of office management experience, she's also been a volunteer for our colleagues at Friends of Nevada Wilderness. Rita and her family have done volunteer field work for FNW since 2007, and most recently spent time on the Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge removing old livestock fences from the rangeland.

"I love doing that type of thing – protecting wildlands and doing what I can to clean it up," Rita said. "I think it's important to give back to the Earth."

Rita has involved her entire family in field work – her husband and daughter often join her for volunteer projects, and one of her five grandchildren had his first experience in the field when he was just 7 months old and the family did some volunteer work on the Black Rock Desert.



Nic Nelson backpacking near Half Dome.

Nic Nelson also is no stranger to field work. Nic most recently was Nevada Regional Director for the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, where he managed and coordinated on-the-ground conservation work and habitat stewardship. In previous years, he worked as a wildlife technician for Idaho Fish and Game. Nic graduated from the University of Idaho in 2007, where he met his wife, Kristin. He is an avid backpacker, skier, angler



Rita Smyth removing old fences from a wildlife refuge.

and hunter.

Nic said he decided to work for Nevada Wilderness Project because his work with the Elk Foundation helped him fall in love with the state.

"This is a chance to help protect Nevada's landscape," Nic said. "I did a lot of conservation work for the Elk Foundation and just fell in love with this country."

### CONTACT INFORMATION

*Keep this information for when the urge strikes to write to your Congressman*

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- Wild Nevadan** (\$75/month) **ALL** of the above **PLUS** an invitation to special NWP campouts!

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- \$35 Please make checks available to **Nevada Wilderness Project**
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- \$500
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

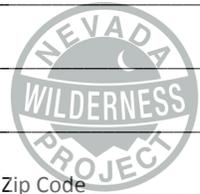
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